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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LAGOS 001250

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STATE FOR AF/W  
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SUBJECT: IMO STATE GOVERNOR TOSSES HIS HAT INTO THE  
PRESIDENTIAL RING

Classified By: Consul General Brian L. Browne for reason 1.4 (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. During a conversation late August with the Consul General, Imo State Governor Achike Udenwa asserted that his bid for the PDP presidential nomination was genuine, not a bargaining chip to secure an important but lesser federal office. Udenwa declared now was the time for an Igbo president. Crediting himself with doing an outstanding job as governor, Udenwa asserted he had as much right as anyone to be that Igbo candidate. While Udenwa and his subordinates lauded their achievements, what we saw was a much more ambivalent picture of uneven economic development, spotty government performance and too much political wrangling in Imo State. End summary.

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SOMEONE WILL BE PRESIDENT, SO WHY NOT THE GOVERNOR?  
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¶2. (C) In meeting with the Consul General who was visiting Imo State, the Governor piped that he was earnest about running for the presidency. He staked claim to a sterling record as governor. Championing the theme of an Igbo president, he pointed to himself as the most plausible candidate among the Igbo governors.

¶3. (C) Udenwa excoriated Obasanjo for his ambition to hang on to office via a third term. Udenwa thought Obasanjo either would stoke the Niger Delta or starve the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) of resources to make it technically impossible to hold elections at the scheduled time.

¶4. (C) Though an ally of Atiku, Udenwa believed Atiku no longer had a chance for the People's Democratic Party (PDP) nomination because of Obasanjo's animus toward the Vice-President. Udenwa predicted that Atiku would leave the party, but as for himself Udenwa has no intention of defecting.

¶5. (C) When Obasanjo found out that Udenwa opposed a third term and harbored presidential ambitions, the President sent the EFCC to scare him, Udenwa claimed. The EFCC scoured his administration's financial records and detained personnel, but Udenwa insisted he has nothing to hide and the investigation has turned up nothing against him. Now that he believes Obasanjo and the EFCC have given him their best punch and he has withstood it, Udenwa felt he no longer had to worry about what Obasanjo thought of him.

¶6. (C) During the CG's visit to Owerri, senior state government officials lavished their governor with praise. The CG toured a state hospital, road construction site, an

impressive administration complex and a potentially promising but heretofore uninhabited housing estate. Udenwa has made some improvements in the state but his record is not nearly as replete as his minions would proclaim. Most roads were in a state of disrepair, trash was accumulating, and the state's civil service looked bloated and inefficient. Udenwa has been unable to attract business and investment. Too many of the government construction contracts appear to end up with the same awardees. Moreover, Udenwa is also in a wrestling match over control of the PDP state chapter with Senator Arthur Nzerike and other Imo State political figures aligned with President Obasanjo. Because Udenwa is not as universally popular as he portrayed himself, the outcome of this internecine party struggle is much in doubt.

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COMMENT  
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17. (C) Imo is not the best of states nor is it the worst of them. The same can be said of Governor Udenwa's performance. Despite his exuberance, Udenwa's quest of the presidency is a long shot. A governor whose performance has been average, whose persona is less than compelling, and whose state is small and on the periphery of the national limelight does not have much of a chance. However, Udenwa, despite his protestations, is probably not viewing the presidency. He has likely tossed his hat into the ring to galvanize his supporters so he can maintain control of the state party apparatus. From there, he could dictate who will become the party's gubernatorial candidate. Additionally, with the state chapter as his playing card, Udenwa could bid for a lesser federal position, a ministerial post or, should fortune smile broadly, he has an outside chance at the vice-presidential nomination. Udenwa is not the only

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governor thinking along these lines. There are roughly ten southern governors hoisting their presidential campaign banners. Most of these governors are shooting high but actually have a lower target--a federal ministry or the Vice-Presidency--in mind. End Comment.

BROWNE